

Results of 2003 Michigan Shelter Survey – 176 Shelters

CANINES	YOUNGER THAN SIX MONTHS		SIX MONTHS OR OLDER		Total
	Not Altered	Altered	Not Altered	Altered	
Received/Admitted	27020	667	74609	18105	126676
Returned to Owner	1388	163	20942	5530	28775
Adopted	11458	3080	13366	10531	40005
Sold (incl. Research)	531	49	1797	312	2726
Transferred (law enf., service)	927	25	2545	614	4508
Euthanatized	10477	63	37868	6304	56972
Other (died, stolen, escaped, otherwise disappeared)	423	8	3972	3151	7667
Total discharged	25204	3388	80491	26442	140653
FELINES					
Received/Admitted	47974	1770	52071	13776	116812
Returned to Owner	542	1375	1548	2361	5826
Adopted	12202	4168	7353	8529	32251
Sold (incl. Research)	607	39	3430	76	4153
Transferred (law enf., service)	1362	95	2156	3658	7271
Euthanatized	29058	232	40068	6963	76321
Other (died, stolen, escaped, otherwise disappeared)	1718	2881	3729	256	8584
Total Discharged	45489	8790	58284	21843	134405



(Abstract) Rates of Euthanasia and Adoption for Dogs and Cats in Michigan Animal Shelters.

By Paul Bartlett, A, Bartlett, S. Halstead and S. Walshaw. *Submitted to J. of Applied Animal Welfare (11/04/04).*

Requirements of Michigan state law regarding animal shelters were used to collect and analyze admission and discharge data for all 176 animal shelters licensed in Michigan. In 2003, 140,653 dogs were discharged from Michigan shelters. Of these discharged dogs, 56,972 (40%) were euthanatized and 40,005 (28%) were adopted. This is an annual euthanasia rate of 2.6% of the estimated 2003 Michigan canine population. Michigan shelters discharged 134,405 cats in 2003, of which 76,321 (57%) were discharged by euthanasia and (24%) were discharged by adoption. The ratio of euthanatized cats to owned cats was estimated at 3.1%. Smaller shelters had higher adoption rates, and private shelters had higher adoption rates compared with those operated by local government. Our data suggest that progress is being made in reducing the pet overpopulation problem, but it is also possible that earlier estimates of pet euthanasia were overstated.

PET OVERPOPULATION PROBLEM MAY BE IMPROVING

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Thousands of shelter workers spend countless hours battling the pet overpopulation problem. Are we making any progress?

Before any problem can be solved, it must be measurable so that attempted solutions can be evaluated to determine if they are working. The pet overpopulation problem has historically been very difficult to measure. When unwanted pets must be euthanatized at shelters, it is difficult to judge if they were "adoptable". Most attempts to count the number of pets that are euthanatized had to rely on voluntary surveys. However, shelters from which data is made available are almost certainly not representative of all shelters. Another problem is due to the manner in which private and municipal shelters have overlapping jurisdictions, so the true population of animals from which volunteering shelters receive animals is often unknown. If data are not available from all shelters within a defined geographical area, it is impossible to accurately determine a rate of euthanasia per unit of pet population.

In 1997, Michigan law required all licensed shelters to report dog, cat and ferret admissions and discharge statistics. Using this legislative authority, a concerted effort was made to compile shelter statistics for calendar 2003 from all 176 licensed Michigan shelters. Of the 140,653 dogs discharged from Michigan shelters, 56,972 (40%) were euthanatized and 40,005 (28%) were adopted. Expressed another way, 2.6% of the state's estimated canine population was euthanatized in animal shelters in 2003. Michigan shelters discharged a total of 134,405 cats in 2003; 76,321 (57%) by euthanasia and (24%) by adoption. The ratio of euthanatized cats to owned cats in Michigan was 3.1%. Smaller shelters had higher adoption rates, and private shelters had higher adoption rates compared with those operated by local governments. No differences were seen between rural and urban shelters in rates of adoption and euthanasia.

Virginia also conducted a survey of their animal shelters in 2003. The 60,625 dogs euthanatized in Virginia in 2003 was 3.9% of the estimated canine population. The 73,175 cats euthanatized in Virginia were 4.1% of the estimated population of owned cats. These statistics

from Michigan and Virginia include euthanatized animals that were old, sick, aggressive or otherwise not adoptable even under the best of circumstances.

If other states are similar to Michigan in pet ownership and handling patterns, extrapolation of our results to the national level suggest that approximately 1.6 million dogs and 2.2 million cats were euthanatized in shelters nationally in 2003. If comparable to Virginia, we would estimate that 2.4 million dogs and 2.9 million cats were euthanatized nationally in 2003. Either way, these recent estimates are far lower than the estimates of 7 to 17 million that were made 10 – 20 years ago.

The most likely interpretation for the recent data from Michigan and Virginia is that the pet overpopulation problem remains, but that the national effort to foster responsible pet ownership appears to be making progress. Pet overpopulation continues and much work remains, but thanks to the efforts of many people, the problem appears to be improving.

Note: Be sure to visit our web site to answer a few short questions regarding relevant shelter topics. Please go to <http://www.michigan.gov/healthwatch> and complete a few short questions that should take about 30 seconds. Select the survey called “Animal Shelters”. The password is: dog. Results will be tabulated and provided at our next communication.